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A  
L E T T E R  
TO THE  
C L E R G Y  
OF THE  
DIOCESE OF CHESTER,  
CONCERNING  
SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

By B E I L B Y,  
LORD BISHOP OF THAT DIOCESE.

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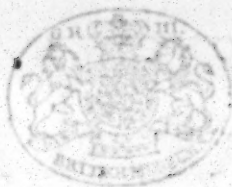
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M,DCC.LXXXVI.

*To. V. 5*



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*Reverend Brethren,*

**T**HE subject on which I now take the liberty of addressing you, is one that has for some time engaged the attention of the public, and which seems so closely connected with the interests of morality and religion, as to deserve our very serious consideration. I mean the rise and progress of what are called SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

During my residence at Chester, the last summer, I received several letters from clergymen, both in the diocese and out of it, respecting these Schools. In general, I was, I must confess, from the first, disposed to approve and encourage them, and accordingly, as far as private correspondence went, I did so. But as they were then quite novel institutions, and some persons of worth and judgment had, I found, their doubts and apprehensions concerning

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them, I thought it prudent, before I went further, to wait a little, till time and experience, and more accurate enquiry, had enabled me to form a more decided judgment of their real value and their probable effects.

The consequence is, that the information I have of late received concerning them, from various quarters (but especially from the great manufacturing towns in my own diocese) have confirmed the favourable opinion I was originally inclined to entertain of them. At the same time, they are not, I am convinced, to be adopted without some qualifications and restrictions. For these reasons, as well as to give an answer to the various applications that have been lately made to me on this subject, I thought it necessary to lay my sentiments before you in this manner. And I shall therefore,

I. State the reasons which induce me to recommend the Sunday Schools to those parishes in my diocese where they may be useful, but are not yet received.

II. Shall



II. Shall subjoin a few precautions concerning them, which seem to me highly necessary to be observed, both where they already are, and where they may hereafter be, established.

I. The extreme depravity and licentiousness which prevail at this time, among the lowest orders of the people (for with these only we are at present concerned) are too apparent to require proof. Their effects we all *see*, and many of us *feel* too, God knows, to our cost. Our houses cannot secure us from outrage, nor can we rest with safety in our beds. The number of criminals encreases so rapidly, that our gaols are unable to contain them, and the magistrates are at a loss how to dispose of them. What remedy then can we apply to these mischiefs? It is not, I apprehend, either the severity of our laws, or the most speedy and vigorous application of them, that will effect a *radical* cure. Our penal code is already sufficiently sanguinary, and our executions sufficiently numerous, to strike terror (if *that* alone would do) into the populace; yet

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they have not hitherto produced any material alteration for the better, and were they multiplied a hundred fold, they would probably fail of the desired effect. They might perhaps give a temporary check; but they would not, they could not go to the *bottom* of the evil. Nothing can reach this, but the searching probe of early discipline and early culture. It is an observation which has become proverbial, and which the experience of all ages has sanctified and confirmed, that *laws* without *manners* will avail nothing. It is equally certain, that manners can no otherwise be regulated than by a right education, by impressing on the minds of youth principles and habits of piety and virtue. To give these to the poor, was the intention of our Charity Schools, and had those wise institutions been sufficiently general and extensive, they would in all probability have obviated a great part of the evils of which we now complain. But the expence of founding and supporting them, necessarily prevents them from becoming *universal*. In many towns, and by far the greatest number of villages, there

there are no Charity Schools at all. In London, and the other great cities of the kingdom, where they are in general established, they can take in only a very small part of the children of the poor. The rest are left of course to themselves, without education, without instruction in the great duties of morality and religion, without any good principles or virtuous discipline to counteract the corruption of their nature, the growth of their passions, the temptations of the world, and the bad examples they too often see at home. Our Charity Schools, therefore, though excellent preventatives as far as they go, yet from their very nature are, and can be nothing more than *partial* and *local* remedies. They can operate only within that comparatively narrow circle to which they are of course confined. The Sunday Schools are consequently a very proper and very useful *appendage* to them, and it is in this light they ought to be considered. They come in at this time very seasonably, to meet the popular vices which too often attend the return of peace and prosperity, and increasing commerce:



they are an extension of the principle on which our Charity Schools are founded; an enlargement of that benevolent system of *gratuitous education for the poor*, which, after all other speculations, is the only expedient we can with confidence look up to for a reformation of manners among the common people.

This alone is a sufficient argument in favour of Sunday Schools; but there are besides several peculiar advantages attending them, which deserve to be specified.

1. The first, is the great facility of establishing and supporting them.

The whole expence of instructing twenty children, including books, rewards, and every other charge, will not amount to five pounds a year; a sum so trifling, and so easy to be raised, that it cannot create the smallest difficulty.

This fortunately puts it into our power to introduce these Schools even into *villages*, where there is not already any provision for teaching the children of the poor. It is true, indeed, that they are  
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*most* necessary and *most* useful in great manufacturing towns, where there is the greatest number of children that want education, and who being in constant employment during the rest of the week, have scarce any leisure allowed them for instruction but on the Lord's Day. In villages, the children of the labourers have, *to a certain age*, sufficient leisure for instruction *every day* in the week. But then, if there is no Charity School in the place (which seldom happens) how will they *obtain* this instruction? As they grow older, they are employed in working with their parents, and are then in the same predicament with children employed in manufactures. Add to this, that in all villages there are numbers of young people of both sexes in service, who have grown up without being taught to read, or to understand even the first rudiments of religion. Now each of these different classes must evidently, without Sunday Schools, be deprived of all education whatever. And, unless this be thought a right thing, those Schools ought to be established in villages as well as in towns. For

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2. The very small degree of learning which is or can be given in these Schools, though highly useful to their *minds*, does not either indispose or disqualify them for undertaking with their *hands* the most laborious employments in town or country. They are neither instructed in writing nor arithmetic. They are merely taught to read, and to make a proper use of their Prayer Books, their Bibles, and a few pious tracts which inculcate the fear of God and the love of man; which enjoin, under pain of eternal punishment, and with the promise of eternal rewards, the great duties of sobriety, industry, veracity, honesty, humility, patience, content, resignation to the will of God, and submission to the authority of their superiors. If instilling these things into the minds of children, and forming them into habits, can be proved to have ever done any harm to them, or the community to which they belong, then, undoubtedly, Sunday Schools ought to be discouraged; but if, on the contrary, these virtues are the *surest*, indeed the *only* means of making individuals happy, and nations prosperous, it will



will be an act not only of Christian charity, but even of political prudence, to countenance those institutions.

3. But this is not all.—The greater part of the children educated in the Sunday Schools are not merely taught to be diligent and laborious by *words* and *precepts*, but, what is far more useful and efficacious, they are actually trained up from their childhood in *habits* of industry. They consist, for the most part, of such as are employed in trades, manufactures, or husbandry-work : to these they give up six days in the week, and on the remaining one (the Lord's Day) they are instructed in the rudiments of Christian faith and practice.

By this wise expedient, that most desirable *union*, which has been so often wished for in Charity Schools, but which it has been generally found so difficult to introduce, is at length accomplished, the union of *manual labour* with *spiritual instruction*. These are, by means of the Sunday Schools, both carried on together, and the interests both of this life and the next so consulted, as not to interfere with or obstruct each other.

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4. It is true, indeed, that a much smaller portion of time is appropriated to the one than to the other : but this is unavoidable. And were the time for instruction even less than it is, yet still these institutions would be highly useful ; because to *habits of industry*, they add also, what is of infinite importance, *habits of piety and devotion*. They *accustom* young people from their earliest childhood to the *practice* of attending public worship, of going with the multitude into the house of God ; of partaking with them in the use of a most excellent form of prayer ; of uniting with them in praises and thanksgivings to their Almighty Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor. The infant mind takes a bent, and begins to form *habits*, much earlier than is generally imagined : and it is of the utmost consequence to give it a *right* direction, before it is twisted into a *wrong* one ; to preoccupy it with a love for God, for religion, for the customary place of worship, and every thing connected with it ; before contrary habits give a distaste, perhaps an aversion to them, which it may  
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be difficult, if not impossible, to overcome.

I consider it, therefore, as one of the principal advantages of Sunday Schools, that they carry a multitude of children to church, who would otherwise probably never have found their road to it; that they literally train them up *in the way they should go*; that they form *associations* of the best sort in the mind, at a time when they will lay the strongest hold upon it; and thus engage and exert the whole force of that most powerful engine in the *service* of religion, which would otherwise be employed with most fatal energy and success *against* it.

5. There is still another benefit arising from the Sunday Schools, which I mention with peculiar satisfaction, because it tends to facilitate greatly what I took the liberty of recommending to you in my last visitatorial charge; I mean the *practice of catechizing*. This, as I then observed to you, is one of the most useful and important duties of our profession, and is found by experience to be the best mode of instructing the young and the ignorant in  
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the principles of Christianity. You have, I believe, been always ready on your part, to give this sort of instruction in your respective parishes. But unfortunately, in too many instances, parents are extremely backward in sending their children to be catechized; and it often happens, that it is dropped for want of proper attendance. This, I hope, the Sunday Schools will not only effectually prevent in future, but will collect together, and bring before you, without any trouble on your part, a much larger number of catechumens, and much better prepared for examination and instruction, than could have been effected by any other means. You will therefore, I am persuaded, avail yourselves of these favourable circumstances; and by catechizing and examining the children that are thus fortunately thrown in your way, as frequently as you can (especially in the summer months) give encouragement to these institutions, and promote the great purpose they have in view, that of disseminating the knowledge and the practice of religion among the poor.

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In this most useful work of examination, that little tract, called *The Catechism broke into short questions and answers*, will be of singular service in trying what advances the children have made in the *real knowledge* of what they have been taught. And if to this you will have the goodness to add (what I cannot too often recommend) a course of plain and short lectures on the Church Catechism, in the room or in the form of a sermon, on Sundays in the afternoon, for three or four of the summer months, you will have the satisfaction to see, in a very few years, the happy effects of your pastoral instructions on the minds of your young parishioners, and will give them reason to bless your kind attention to them, to the latest period of their lives.

These reasons have, I confess, operated powerfully on my mind, and will, I doubt not, on yours, in favour of Sunday Schools. But the best argument for them is the *certain proof* of their utility, which we already have from *experience*. In some places in the diocese of Chester they have been established near two years, and in this space of time their good influence, I am

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assured,

affured, has been very apparent. A visible alteration for the better has taken place in the appearance and conduct of the children; they are become more cleanly in their persons and their dress; more decent and orderly in their behaviour, both on the Lord's Day and on other days. Many of them, who did not so much as know their alphabet, can now read tolerably well, can repeat and seem to comprehend their catechism, and make a good use of their Bibles and Prayer Books. And, what is a very material circumstance, a sense of virtue and religion has manifestly communicated itself from the children to many of their parents.

II. Having sufficiently explained the uses of these Schools, I shall now add a precaution or two respecting their management.

And in the first place, it would be an act of great kindness and utility, if you would pay some attention to the conduct of the teachers, and would take care that no improper books or tracts be put into the hands, nor any wrong principles instilled



stilled into the minds of the scholars under their care. It will also be of the utmost importance, that the young people should punctually and constantly attend divine service every Sunday, both morning and afternoon. This attendance, which, as I before mentioned, seems one of the greatest benefits attending the Sunday Schools, should be strictly required, and no excuse but that of ill health admitted. And those children who repeatedly absent themselves, should be dismissed the school.

These cautions, added to the practice of *frequent catechizing*, will entirely remove all the apprehensions entertained by some, lest the Sunday Schools should be made the instruments of leading the children educated in them into error, superstition, or enthusiasm. On the contrary, they must necessarily, *under your direction, and controul, and assistance*, be the surest means of grounding them well in sound evangelical principles; of keeping them firm to the church in which they were born and educated; and, more especially, of securing them against that danger, which is most carefully to be guarded against

in the diocese of Chester (where Roman Catholics abound so much) the danger of being perverted by the artifices of Popish emissaries.

It might be of use also, if, when any child is admitted into the Sunday Schools, it was made a condition with the parents, that they themselves should also constantly come to church : and if, besides this, a few small religious tracts were put into their hands, they might receive essential benefit from them. The decent and orderly behaviour of the children has been found in some instances (as I have already observed) to have extended itself to their parents ; and it will be worth while to improve this advantage as much as possible. The poor are in general too apt to corrupt their children by their example. If we can make the children reform their parents, it will be a blessed reverse.

But the precaution to which I would more particularly beg to call your attention, is what follows.

Though the great and principal design of the Lord's Day is to draw off our thoughts from worldly objects, to fix them  
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on the concerns of eternity, and unite us in acts of social worship to our Maker; yet it was also meant, both in its original institution, and its subsequent accommodation to the Christian system, to be a day of rest, and ease, and comfort to all, but especially to the lower classes of the people, whose lot it commonly is to earn their daily bread by daily toil. To these, the Sunday is a most seasonable and salutary relief. It is a cordial sent them from Heaven, to cheer their hearts and exhilarate their spirits, to recruit them after their past labours, and prepare them for those that are to follow. Accordingly, they generally look forward to it with eagerness. Suspence of toil is to them a positive blessing; and they enjoy with a keen relish those sober, and temperate, and harmless recreations, which the laws and customs of this country allow them on that day. This delightful view of the Sabbath, it is evidently for the interest of virtue and religion that we should cultivate and cherish, as much as possible, among the common people; should train them up in these sentiments from their childhood;



should impress upon their minds a strong and early prepossession in favour of this sacred day, and inspire them with such a love and affection for it, as may make them always wish for its return, and discharge all the duties of it with alacrity and pleasure. But there is reason to fear that this will not be the case, if almost every hour of the Sunday is taken up either at Church or at School, and little or no interval allowed the Scholars for ease and inoffensive amusement. The business, and discipline, and confinement of a school, are things in some degree always unpleasant to young people, and if they are too rigorously enforced, with scarce any intermission, they will grow burthensome and painful; and these ideas being associated with those of going to church and worshipping God, will be apt to give the children a disgust for those duties, and even for the day itself on which they recur. And if this disgust grows up with, and gains strength with their years, it may tend to make them irreligious and profane.

The utmost care therefore must be taken

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to guard against these fatal consequences. The scholars educated in the Sunday Schools must have sufficient time allowed them for chearful conversation and free intercourse with each other, and, above all, for enjoying the fresh and wholesome air and sunshine, in the fields or gardens, with their relations or friends. This relaxation is necessary for *all*, but *especially* for those who are confined at work in trades or manufactures during the whole week; and still more, where they are employed in a constant course of labour (different sets succeeding each other) *day and night*, which I am told is the case in some of the cotton manufactures \*. All these should certainly

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\* This fact I find confirmed by the report of the physicians of Manchester, respecting a malignant and contagious fever, which raged in the township of Radcliffe, in the year 1784. The regulations there proposed for guarding against such alarming infections for the future, and for preserving the health of the children employed in the cotton works, do honour to the wisdom and benevolence both of the medical gentlemen who drew them up, and of the worthy magistrates who enforced them. There can be no doubt, but that the proprietors of the cotton mills, and other  
factories

have some respite from *every kind* of employment, and should be indulged with the refreshments they want, and have a right to, on the Sunday. I should think that four, or at the most five, hours in the school each Sunday would be confinement fully sufficient for children so circumstanced. In villages, where they are of course more in the open air, during the whole week, a little more time for instruction may be taken in the morning or evening. But rather than intrench too much on the ease, and comfort, and chearfulness of the day, I would give up all the learning that could be acquired by such means, and be content with the other great advantages of the institution. It is the discipline of the heart, more than the instruction of the head, for which the Sunday Schools are chiefly valuable. Both these, I hope, and indeed am firmly persuaded, may be accomplished within, or nearly within, the time I mentioned; but if not,

factories, where children are accustomed to work, will, on every principle of charity, compassion, and sound policy, conceive themselves bound to observe most punctually and religiously those excellent regulations.

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let the latter be sacrificed to the spirit and intention of the day\*. Were the Sunday Schools to be considered merely as Schools of order, of decency, of virtue, of religion, they would, even in that view only, amply deserve approbation and encouragement.

Upon the same principle just mentioned, of preserving as much as possible *the cheerful aspect* of the Lord's Day, I should hope that no kind of *severe correction* would ever find its way into the Sunday Schools. The infliction of any corporal punishment would probably render the day odious to the young sufferers, and give them unfavourable impressions of it, and every thing belonging to it, as long as they lived. These institutions must be founded on a

\* From a similar regard to the rest and sanctity of the Sabbath, it may be advisable, in those places where the subscription and the situation of the children will admit of it, to appropriate a few hours on the Saturday evening, instead of the Sunday, to *that part* of the business which consists in *teaching the children to read*. This would take away from the Sunday Schools every thing that could have the slightest appearance of a *secular* occupation, and leave nothing for the Lord's Day, but what is perfectly of a *religious* nature.

system not of severity, but of kindness, of persuasion, of encouragement, of reward. These must be the only incitements to industry made use of there. Small books and tracts, and other similar prizes of a very trifling value, would be engines sufficiently powerful to set the minds of the little multitude in motion, and to excite a spirit of emulation, which would operate more powerfully perhaps than any degree of rigour or coercion.

With these limitations and precautions, I have no doubt but Sunday Schools may be productive of the best consequences. And as they have already made a considerable progress in some parts of the diocese of Chester, it would give me much satisfaction to see them equally well received through the whole extent of it, wherever there is a fair prospect of their being useful. Should this be effected by your zeal and activity, a very large and populous and wealthy district of the kingdom would be under the highest obligations to you, for scattering so widely the seeds of piety and virtue. The next century, if not the present, would probably, in consequence  
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of these benevolent exertions of yours, perceive an astonishing change in the manners of the common people. And they who should live to see so desirable a reformation would not, I trust, forget (most assuredly your Heavenly Master would not forget) to whose kindness and to whose labours they stood indebted for such substantial benefits.

I am,  
Reverend Brethren,  
Your affectionate Friend,  
and faithful Servant,

London,  
March 31, 1786.

B. CHESTER.

P. S. For the convenience of those parishes in my diocese, that are desirous of establishing Sunday Schools, but have not yet formed any plan for that purpose, I have subjoined the sketch of one, taken principally from some very judicious regulations drawn up by my excellent friend the Bishop of Salisbury, for the use of his own diocese; with a few alterations and additions, to accommodate them to that of Chester, and to the information received from thence.

A PLAN



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A  
P L A N  
FOR THE  
ESTABLISHMENT AND  
CONDUCT  
OF  
SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

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1. **W**HERE a parish is large, the direction of the Schools should be vested in a committee to be chosen annually from the body of the subscribers, consisting of seven persons; of which the minister should be a permanent member. Where the parish is small, the sole superintendence should be in the minister.

2. One master or mistress should not teach more than from thirty to forty children.

3. The

3. The number of masters or mistresses, and of scholars, will depend on the extent of the subscription. In the town of Manchester, there are 37 schools, 73 teachers, and 2,520 scholars.

4. No children should be admitted under five years of age, nor excluded at any age. Should those of the latter description prove too refractory, after repeated admonitions they must be expelled.

5. A shilling each Sunday to the master or mistress, will be sufficient for teaching 20 scholars: allowing forty shillings per annum more for books, rewards, &c. the whole annual expence, for twenty children, will not exceed £.4. 12s.

6. No child to be admitted without a recommendation from a subscriber; and no subscriber shall recommend any children whose parents may be supposed able to pay for their education elsewhere.

7. The parents must be required to send their children to school perfectly clean and  
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neat in their persons, and as decently cloathed as their circumstances will allow.

8. In great manufacturing towns, where the children are employed in constant work, they should not be kept in school more than two hours before morning service, and two hours after evening service, in the winter; and in summer, another hour between the two services. In small towns and villages, one hour more in the school may be added (if necessary) in the morning or evening.—See page 22 of the preceding Letter.

9. The children are to attend their master or mistress constantly to church, both morning and afternoon.

10. The names of the scholars should be called over every Sunday in the school, and when they go to church; and the names of the absentees from each should be entered in a book, to be shewn to the committee.

11. The

11. The teachers should begin and end the day, in the School, with a short prayer; and it might be useful to add (if they are capable of it) part of a psalm from one of the allowed versions, set to a plain old tune.

12. Nothing should be taught in these schools, but what is suited to the design of the Sabbath, and to the preserving of young people from ignorance, idleness, immorality, and irreligion.

13. The children are to be instructed in reading, and the church catechism, and the scriptures; and in such plain religious truths as they can understand, and will tend to direct and fix their faith, improve their hearts, and regulate their manners.

14. Great faults, such as swearing, lying, stealing, and frequent absences from school and church, should, after sufficient admonition, be punished with expulsion.

15. Occasional rewards should be bestowed on the deserving scholars.

16. An

16. An examination of the scholars once a month, in their reading, catechism, and prayers, by the minister of the parish, would be of infinite service.—But on the article of catechizing in particular, see page 13 of the preceding Letter.

17. When a child is admitted into the school, his parents should be called before the committee, and told that they are expected to attend church as well as their children, and to abstain from swearing, drunkenness, lying, stealing, and every other sin that may corrupt the manners of their children, and counteract the good effects of the Sunday Schools.

T H E E N D.



*Speedily will be published,*

In One Volume 8vo,

THE FIFTH EDITION, OF

S E R M O N S

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS,

By B E I L B Y,

LORD BISHOP OF CHESTER.

